

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Masters  
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**In-School CSR and its impact on Brand Image, Brand  
Identification and Brand Reputation: the moderator effect  
of Brand Familiarity, Product Involvement and Cause-  
Brand Fit**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to understand how children respond to an in-school CSR activity when fictionally sponsored by a brand. Despite the wide range of studies on the impacts of CSR activities on adults, our research aims at studying their impact on children. We analysed the outcomes of Brand Image, Brand Reputation, Brand Identification and Perceived Intent. Also, we studied the moderator effects of Product Involvement, Brand Familiarity and Cause-Brand Fit. A structured questionnaire was completed by a sample of 108 children from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. Results suggest that CSR activities don't always have a positive impact on Brand Image, Reputation and Identification. The lack of a perceived Cause-Brand Fit might be the reason for these surprising results.

**Key Words:** CSR, Brand familiarity, Product Involvement, Cause-Brand Fit, Perceived Intent, Children,

## **Table of contents**

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Literature Review.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).....	4
2.2 In School Marketing (ISM).....	5
2.3 Brand Reputation.....	6
2.4 Brand Identification.....	7
2.5 Brand Familiarity.....	8
2.6 Product Involvement.....	10
2.7 Cause-Brand Fit.....	12
2.8 Ethicality.....	14
<b>3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 Legal and ethical issues.....	15
3.2 Sample.....	15
3.3 Research Design.....	16
3.4 Procedure.....	17
3.5 Measures.....	18
<b>4. Results.....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 Brand Image.....	21
4.2 Brand Reputation.....	23
4.3 Brand Identification.....	24
4.4 Perceived Intent.....	26
<b>5. Discussions and implications.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>6. Limitations and future research.....</b>	<b>27</b>

## **1. Introduction**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly becoming an essential part of doing business. While in 1977 less than half of the Fortune 500 firms ever mentioned CSR in their annual reports (Lee, 2008), by the end of 1990 close to 90% of them embraced CSR as an essential element in their organizational goal, and actively promoted their CSR activities in annual reports (Boli and Hartsuiker, 2001). Despite this increasing popularity, literature suggests that CSR outcomes are not always according to the companies' expectations. When studying this phenomenon, researchers have found possible moderators such as Brand Familiarity, Product Involvement and Cause-Brand fit. However, limited literature has explained how exactly they influence CSR outcomes. This lack of research is even more prominent when children are considered. The aim of this research is, in this way, to understand if these three variables also play a moderating role in the impact of CSR activities when these are directed to children. To do this, we will study the impact of a CSR activity at a school on Brand Image, Brand Reputation, Brand Identification and Perceived Intent; taking as moderators the Brand Familiarity, Product Involvement and Cause-Brand fit.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is conceptualized by Kotler and Lee (2005:3) as a “commitment to improve community well being through discretionary businesses practices and contributions of corporate resources”. According to the same authors, corporate social initiatives can take form as cause promotions, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering and socially responsible business practices. Out of these, the CSR

initiatives most commonly used and discussed in literature are sponsorship, cause-related marketing (CRM), and philanthropy (Polonsky and Speed, 2001; Lii and Lee, 2012). While sponsorship and CRM are associated with marketing resources and objectives, specifically linking economic and social goals of a firm (in Lii and Lee, 2012:3<sup>1</sup>), true philanthropy involves a firm making a contribution to a worthy cause without any expectation of a benefit tied to that effort (in Lii and Lee, 2012:3<sup>2</sup>). Overall, CSR is a subject of increasing interest in business practice and business research due to its associated beneficial outcomes. A responsible image can allow firms to differentiate themselves from their competitors (in Lin-Hi and Muller, 2013:2<sup>3</sup>), positively affect the purchasing decisions of customers (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen, 2007) and strengthen customer loyalty as well as customer satisfaction (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004). Furthermore, studies demonstrate that CSR can “enhance the attractiveness of a corporation as an employer, increase organizational commitment (...) and improve relationships with local communities” (in Lin-Hi and Muller, 2013:2).

## 2.2 In-School Marketing (ISM)

When developing their CSR programs, many companies choose to build partnerships specifically with education establishments. These activities are called In-School Marketing (ISM). ISM is conceptualized as “activities between commercial organizations and schools that are designed to generate resources or funding for schools whilst simultaneously satisfying the organization’s corporate communication objectives” (Doster and Tyrell, 2007). ISM ranges from collection/redemption

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<sup>1</sup> **McAlister, D. T., and Ferrell, L.** (2002) “The role of strategic philanthropy in marketing strategy”, *European Journal of Marketing* 36 (5/6), 689-705

<sup>2</sup> **Shaw, B. and Post, F. R.** (1993) “A moral basis for corporate philanthropy” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 12, 745-751; **Collins, M.** (1994). Global corporate philanthropy and relationship marketing. *European Management Journal*, 12, 226-234

<sup>3</sup> **McWilliams, A., and Siegel, D. S.** (2001), “Corporate Social Responsibility: A theory of the firm perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 26, 117-127.

schemes through branded vending machines, sponsored teaching materials, mentoring projects and work experience provisions (McIndoe, 1999; Watts 2004). Some of these ISM activities are overt sales promotional techniques, whilst others can be classified as altruistic philanthropy whereby a ‘contribution’ is given to the school as part of a company’s community relations program (Doster and Tyrrell,2011).

In general, commercial involvement in schools has increased over the last decade and is likely to continue as both government and schools seek private/public partnerships to support teaching and learning programs (Doster and Tyrrell,2011). However, parents’ attitude towards in-school marketing activities is not always benevolent and they were much more in favour of altruistic schemes, with an educational intent and the promotion of healthy products and habits. Following this reasoning, an educational program addressing nutrition represents an opportunity for brands to invest in this type of CSR without compromising parents’ acceptability.

### **2.3 Brand Reputation**

Corporate reputation incorporates the more or less favourable regard in which companies are held by stakeholders (Fombrun and Rindova,2000) and is linked to how ethically/unethically an organization is perceived to conduct its business(es) (in Brunk,2010:2<sup>4</sup>). This notion of “ethical/unethical” behaviour depends on an individual’s personal judgment of right/wrong or good/bad, relating to a company’s respect for moral norms and values, and the desirability of its outcomes (Brunk,2010). A good reputation can set a company apart from its competitors, and through creating vital points-of-difference (POD) may act as a source of competitive advantage

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<sup>4</sup> **Bendixen M, Abratt R.** (2007), Corporate identity, ethics and reputation in supplier–buyer relationships, *Journal of Business Ethics* 76(1): 69–82.; **Worcester R, Dawkins J.,** (2005), Surveying Ethical and Environmental Attitudes. In *The Ethical Consumer*, Harrison R, Terry N, Deirdre S (eds).

(Brunk, 2010:1<sup>5</sup>). For its potential value creation and association to positive financial outcomes, Brand Reputation is identified as one of the most valuable firm's assets (Peloza, 2005; Roberts and Dowling, 2002).

CSR has been considered a form of reputation building or maintenance (McWilliams et al, 2006; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Pfau et al., 2008). In fact, with regards to Corporate Social behavior, Reputation is so important that it is considered to be one of the most relevant aspects achievable with CSR actions (Peloza, 2005).

## 2.4 Brand Identification

Brand identification “demonstrates the degree to which the brand expresses and enhances the individual's identity” (in Dimitriadis and Papista, 2010: 390<sup>6</sup>) and has been applied as a relationship indicating strength of the consumer-brand relationship.

The understanding of Brand Identification has been based on the social identity theory and on organizational identification research. On one hand, social identity theory (in Dimitriadis and Papista, 2010: 390<sup>7</sup>) suggests that, in articulating their sense of self, people go beyond their personal identity to develop a social identity. On the other hand, organizational identification is defined as “one form of psychological attachment that occurs when members adopt the defining characteristics of the organization as defining characteristics for themselves” (in Dimitriadis and

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<sup>5</sup> Keller K.L., Sternthal B., Tybout, A. (2002) “Three questions you need to ask about your brand”, Harvard Business Review 80 (9): 80-86; Keller, K.L., (2008) *“Strategic Brand Management – Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity”* (3rd edition). ;Fombrun C.J., (1996), *“Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image”*, Harvard Business School Press: Boston, MA; Fukuawa, K., Balmer, J.M T., Gray, E.R. (2007), *“Mapping the interface between corporate identity, ethics and corporate social responsibility”*, Journal of Business Ethics 76 (1):1-5

<sup>6</sup> Kim, Chung K., Han, Dongchul and Park, Seung-Bae (2001), “The effect of brand personality and brand identification on brand loyalty: applying the theory of social identification”, Japanese Psychological Research, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 195-206.

<sup>7</sup> Tajfel, H., Turner, J.C. (1985) “The social identity theory of intergroup behavior”, In: Worchel, Stephen and William, G. Austin (eds), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall

Papista,2010: 390<sup>8</sup>)

When identifying with a particular brand, people experience a positive psychological outcome in the form of enhanced self-esteem and are more likely to engage in favourable action strategies towards the brand (in Dimitriadis and Papista, 2010:390<sup>9</sup>). Dimitriadis and Papista (2010) extensively studied these possible outcomes and found that, the higher the consumer-brand identification, the more willing the consumer will be to continue the relationship, to purchase additional products of the same brand, and to perform favourable word-of-mouth on its behalf.

Finally, the concept of CSR has also been associated with consumer-brand identification and Bhattacharya et al. (1995) argued that consumers are likely to identify with organizations involved in discretionary citizenship. Since CSR can enhance a consumer-brand identification, it is relevant to address which variables moderate this relationship and why. To define the term of moderator, we took the definition from Baron and Kenny (1986:2) that “a moderator is a qualitative (e.g. sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g., level of reward) variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable”. Unlike mediating events, which shift roles from effects to causes, depending on the focus of the analysis, moderator variables always function as independent variables (Baron and Kenny, 1986). For the purpose of this research, we propose three variables as possible moderators of the CSR outcomes previously addressed: Brand Familiarity, Product Involvement and Cause-Brand Fit.

## **2.5 Brand familiarity**

Alba and Hutchinson (1987:411) conceptualize familiarity as “the number of product

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<sup>8</sup> Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., and Harquail, C. V. (1994), “Organizational images and member identification”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol9, No2, pp 239-263

<sup>9</sup> Donovan, Todd D., Janda, Swinder and Suh, Jaebeom (2006), “Environmental influences in corporate brand identification and outcomes”, *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 14, No. 1/2, pp 125-136.



related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer”, including advertising exposures, information search, interactions with salespersons, choice and decision making, purchasing, and product usage in various situations.

The schema theory is one of the bases of brand familiarity research. A schema is “an organized collection of beliefs and feelings represented in a cognitive category” (Solomon et al.,2006:654), which becomes stronger as the knowledge of the brand increases (in Simões,2013:7<sup>10</sup>). For a low familiarity brand, the schema would be more susceptible to change with new information stimulus, while for a high familiar brand this new information would be less effective since its schema is already strongly developed (in Simões,2013:7<sup>11</sup>).

Several authors also suggest that, the more familiar a brand is, more highly structured associations characterize consumer’s knowledge (in Carrillat et al., 2005:53<sup>12</sup>). With an increased familiarity, more cognitive capacity is required for processing previous associations linked to a brand, and, as a consequence, fewer cognitive resources are available for processing new information (Carrillat et al., 2005). From these findings we can predict that, when faced with an educational program, consumers are likely to engage in less extensive processing for familiar brands than for less familiar brands.

Furthermore, because consumer’s cognitive structures for familiar brands are more rigid than their cognitive structure for less familiar brands, we can expect existing associations and attitudes for the less familiar brands to be more influenced by an

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<sup>10</sup> **Lord, C., Ross, L., and Lepper, M.** (1979), “Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: the effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37: 2098-2109.

<sup>11</sup> **Musante, M.** (2006), “Sport sponsorship as an image development opportunity for new brands”, *Innovative marketing*, 2(4):83-91

<sup>12</sup> **Low, G. S. and Lamb, C. W. J.**(2000),“The measurement and dimensionality of brand associations”,*Journal of Product and Brand Management*,Vol 9,No.6, pp.350-368;**Simonin, B. L., and Ruth, J. A.** (1998), “Is a company known by the company it keeps? Assessing the spillover effects of brand aliances on consumer brand atitudes”, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol 35, No. 1, pp. 30-42

association such as an educational program.

In fact, previous findings from cause-brand alliances do suggest that brand familiarity can play a moderating role in the expected outputs (Lafferty et al, 2004). Brand Familiarity is expected to influence the effectiveness of the sponsorship image transfer, since the effect of sponsorship on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions was proved to be stronger for sponsoring brands with relatively low familiarity (Carrillat et al., 2005). After replicating the study with children, Simões (2013) also found the familiarity of the sponsor's brand to have a very important influence on the amount of brand image transference, which was shown to be stronger for low familiarity brands.

Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H1: CSR actions have a positive effect on Brand Image*

*H1a. CSR actions have a stronger effect on Brand Image for non-familiar brands*

*H2. CSR actions have a positive effect on Brand Reputation*

*H2a: CSR actions have a stronger effect on Brand Reputation for non-familiar brands*

*H3. . CSR actions have a positive effect on Brand Identification*

*H3a: CSR actions have a stronger effect on Brand Identification for non-familiar brands*

## **2.6 Product involvement**

Product involvement can be referred to the personal relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985). According to previous research, product involvement can significantly affect consumer attitude, brand preference and consumer decision-making process (in Zhou et al., 2012:49<sup>13</sup>).

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<sup>13</sup> Suh, J., and Yi, Y. (2006), "When brand attitudes affect the consumer satisfaction-loyalty relation. The moderating role of product involvement", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16(2), 145-155; Warrington, P., and Shim, P. (2000), "An empirical investigation of the relationship between product

In addition, research has found product involvement as a moderator of CSR's impact on product and company evaluations (Zhou et al., 2012). Making use of the accessibility-diagnostics framework (Feldman and Lynch, 1988), the author's argument was that the threshold for the diagnosticity of information decreases when involvement increases. As a result, when consumers have a low involvement with a product, corporate associations would have more inference on product evaluations than on consumers highly involved. Zhou et al. (2012) confirmed these expectations and found CSR associations to have a greater influence on consumers' corporation and product evaluations under a low (versus high) product involvement condition.

Another way of addressing the moderator role of product involvement on CSR's impact is by making use of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of attitude change (Gwinner, 1997). According to this model, persuasion can occur along two routes, the central route that motivates product-relevant thought, and a peripheral route, based on an association of the object with positive or negative cues, such as pleasant images or famous endorses. This theory was the base for sponsorship literature to address the moderating role of product involvement. Since sponsorship is considered an indirect promotional technique, lacking information about the product itself, it was suggested that it would operate along the peripheral route of the ELM model (Gwinner, 1997). Findings supported these predictions and concluded that sponsorship promotions would be more effective in shaping consumer's attitudes towards a sponsor's brand under low involvement goods rather than high involvement ones. Since CSR educational programs also lack available information about the product itself and are built on an association between a brand and a cause, we predict that they also act

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involvement and brand commitment", *Psychology and Marketing*, 17(9), 761-782; **Xue, F.** (2008), "The moderating effect of product involvement on situational brand choice", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 25(2), 85-94

along the peripheral route. Therefore, as a peripheral route allows product evaluation without engaging in an extensive product-relevant thinking, CSR educational programs should have a greater impact under low rather than high involvement products. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H1b: CSR actions have a stronger impact on Brand Image for low involvement products*

*H2b: CSR actions have a stronger impact on Brand Reputation for low involvement products*

*H3b: CSR actions have a stronger impact on Brand Identification for low involvement products*

## **2.7 Cause-brand fit**

Perceived fit is the “degree of similarity or compatibility that consumers perceive to exist between the cause and the brand”, and has been assumed to be influential to the ultimate success of the partnerships (Lafferty, 2007:448).

According to research streams in marketing such as brand extensions, co-marketing alliances, sponsorships, and brand alliances, perceived fit generally leads to a positive effect on attitudes (in Lafferty, 2007:448<sup>14</sup>). Some authors even suggest that a lack of fit between a brand and a cause might even mitigate the outcomes of a CSR activity.

The congruency theory is one of the most used for studying the effects of fit. It suggests that relatedness or similarity influences storage and retrieval of information from memory. Accordingly, the more congruent, the better the association and retrieval (Lafferty, 2007).

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<sup>14</sup> Aaker, D.A. and Keller, K.L. (1990) “Consumer evaluations of brand extensions”, *J Mark* (January) 1990;54:27-41; Bucklin, L.P., and Sengupta, S. (1993) “Organizing successful co-marketing alliances”, *J Mark* 54:32-46 Rifon, N. J., Choi, S. M., Trimble C. S. and Li, H. (2004) “Congruence effects in sponsorship: The mediating role of sponsor credibility and consumer attributions of sponsor motive”, *J Adv* 33:29-43

Despite the large body of research in line with the congruency theory, findings suggest that the perceived fit between the cause and the brand does not always play a key role in attitude formation and purchase intentions (Lafferty, 2007). One of the possible reasons suggested by Lafferty (2007) is the emotion associated with a cause that is missing in other brand alliances. Causes typically generate affective reactions, regardless of the fit in the partnership, which can precede and influence cognitions (in Lafferty, 2007: 451<sup>15</sup>). Just the fact that the brand is aligned with a cause may be sufficient to positively influence their perceptions of the company, brand and purchase intent. This is supported by the social identity theory (in Lafferty, 2007: 451<sup>16</sup>), which states that “individuals choose activities congruent with salient aspects of their identity and support institutions that embody those activities”. Overall, Lafferty (2007) states that a sense of connectedness might lead to more favourable attitude towards the brand (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001) regardless of cause brand fit. Research on congruency between the cause and the brand also addressed the mediator role of the level of incongruity within the two. The Mandler's Schema Incongruity Theory suggests that the level of incongruity will determine what type of processing the individual will use to resolve the incongruity (in Lafferty, 2007: 451<sup>17</sup>). For relatively weak levels of incongruity, assimilation will be used to easily incorporate that information into an existing schema and achieve congruity. Therefore, marketers can develop associations to a cause that contains a light level of incongruity and still

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<sup>15</sup> **Zajonc, R. B.** (1980), “Feeling and thinking: preferences need no inferences”, *Am Psychol* 1980; 35:151-75

<sup>16</sup> **Mael, F., Ashford, B. E.** (1992), “Alumni and their alma mater: a partial test of the reformulated model of organization identification”, *J. Organ Behav*, 13:103-23

<sup>17</sup> **Lee, E-J., Schumann, D.W.** (2004), “Explaining the special case of incongruity in advertising: combining classic theoretical approaches”, *Mark Theory* (1/2) 2004; 4:59-50; **Mandler, G.**, (1982), “The structure of value: accounting for taste” In: Margaret H, Clarke S, Fiske ST, editors. *Affect and cognition: the 17th annual Carnegie symposium on cognition*. Hillsdale (NJ): Lawrence Erlbaum;P 3-36

elicit favourable attitudes (in Lafferty, 2007: 451<sup>18</sup>)

In addition, literature on sponsorship studied the mediator role of familiarity on the congruency between the cause and the brand. Familiarity with the cause was found to interact with fit when attitudes toward the sponsorship and the brand were measured, such that fit matters less to those who are more familiar with the cause. (Zdravkovic et al., 2008).

Children in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade (represented in our sample) are familiar with the cause regarding healthy nutritional habits, since it is part of the Science material lectured at school. Therefore, we can predict that the cause-brand fit will not significantly affect their attitude towards educational programs.

## **2.8 Ethicality**

Organizations have adopted social causes based on the assumption that consumers will reward them with beneficial outcomes such as the ones previously addressed. However, it is unlikely that consumers will blindly accept these social initiatives as sincere actions and thus may or may not respond as expected (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Consumers might even punish the firms they perceive as insincere in their social involvement. (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2004). Therefore, it is increasingly important for companies to understand how consumers perceive their intent for developing CSR activities and what moderates their scepticism towards them.

Literature suggests that perceived corporate motivation is one of the variables likely to influence consumers' attitudes toward firms and their social initiatives (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Although the act of supporting a social initiative may seem to be a public serving action, consumers' perceptions of the underlying motivations for the

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<sup>18</sup> Meyers-Levy, J., Tybout, A.M. (1989) "Schema congruity as a basis for product evaluation", J. Consumer Research (June) 1989;16:39-54

act may drive their evaluations of the firm and impact beliefs, attitudes, and intentions (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Related to this, the attribution theory (Jones and Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967, 1972) and the persuasion knowledge model provide a basis for the argument that consumers will attempt to understand firms' motives embedded within marketing communications. Thus, when presented with evidence of a firm's social involvement such as an educational program, consumers are likely to elaborate on the message and assign one of two primary types of motives (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006): firm-self serving (e.g., to increase profits) or public serving (e.g., help needy citizens). Accordingly, when motivations are considered firm serving or profit-related, attitudes toward firms are likely to diminish; when motivations are considered socially motivated, attitudes toward firms are likely to be enhanced.

We wonder whether out of all this what will be the perceived intent of children of a CSR action such as an educational program.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Legal and ethical issues**

Ethical and legal requirements were taken into account. To respect children's vulnerability UNICEF's guidelines (2002) were considered. The aim of the study was explained to children and confidentiality was guaranteed. Moreover, children were informed that despite their parents' authorization they could participate in the study or refuse to do it (MacNaughton et al., 2001).

#### **3.2 Sample**

The study was conducted with children from 9 to 11 years old (in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade), on the concrete operational stage of Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Piaget and Inhelder, 1972). We sent 290 consent forms to children's parents of two private schools in Lisbon, resulting in 108 authorizations and a response rate of 37,2%.

### 3.3 Research design

The aim of this research is to study how Product Involvement, Brand Familiarity and Cause-Brand fit moderate the impact of CSR activities on Brand Image, Brand Identification, Brand Reputation and Perceived Intent. The experiment was conducted in a form of an educational program that was fictionally sponsored by a brand.

In order to assess the moderator role of **Product Involvement**, two product categories were selected to be part of the main study. We used a previous research from Simões (2013) to define the categories with high/low involvement, since the author's research was also conducted with children from 7 to 11 years old. On her study, Simões (2013) concluded that tennis shoes had a high involvement and soft drinks a low involvement, with means of 3.888 and 2.75 respectively (on a scale from 1 to 5 of the importance of the product to the child). Since our study is about implementing an educational program in a school, and due to the unhealthy character of the soft drink product, we substituted by another food product which is also very well known by children of this age, yogurts (Agante, 2012), but maintained the tennis shoes as the high involvement category.

To assess the moderator role of **Brand Familiarity**, a familiar and a non-familiar brand were selected for each of the two product categories integrating this study. To do this, during the **Pre-test**, children were asked to select the brands that were familiar to them from a list of well-known tennis shoes and yogurts (Achenreiner and John, 2003). Additionally, in order to choose just one brand from the range of familiar brands, the respondents were asked to state which of the brands they preferred.

Finally, the third moderator variable integrating this study was the **Cause-Brand Fit**. To study this variable, a pre-test was needed to assess the perceived fit between the Educational Program and the brand sponsoring it. Accordingly, during the **Pre-test**,



children were also asked if it made sense that the brands were connected to this particular Educational Program. The question was adapted from Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) and Olson and Thjomoe (2011) studies, and we used a 5-point Smiley face Likert scale from 1=not at all to 5=A lot. We expected to verify a Cause-Brand fit between the yogurt brands and the nutritional educational program and a lack of it between the tennis shoes and the same cause.

16 children answered Pre-test 1 and the results were Nike and New Balance as the tennis shoes brands, with high and low familiarity respectively, and Danone and Alpro as the yogurt brands, with high and low familiarity respectively. Regarding the Cause-Brand fit, the results closely confirmed our expectations: a mean of 2,50 for Nike; 3,25 for New Balance and Alpro; and 4,56 for Danone. This means that the familiar brand in the tennis shoes category was perceived with the lowest fit with the cause (mean=2,50), while the familiar brand in the yogurts category was perceived with the highest (mean=4,56). According to the respondents, the non-familiar brands in both categories revealed the same Cause-Brand fit (mean=3,25).

### 3.4 Procedure

Children were assigned to two groups, a Control Group and an Experimental Group.

The first was composed of 35 children while the second comprised 75, as follows:

**Table 1:** Identification of the experimental groups

<b>Experimental design</b>	<b>High involvement product</b>	<b>Low involvement product</b>
<b>Familiar brand</b>	EG1 – Nike (18)	EG2 – Danone (22)
<b>Non-familiar brand</b>	EG3 - New Balance (19)	EG4 – Alpro (16)

The stimulus used in the main study was an educational program sponsored by a different brand in each experimental group, as illustrated in the table above.

The experimental session was inserted among regular school classes and was lectured

by the researcher. In the beginning of the class, the educational session was presented as an offer by the corresponding brand and the researcher was introduced to the participants as an employee of the company. The session comprised two activities: (1) Nutritional knowledge and behaviour recommendations: Nutritional knowledge was provided by following a content guide designed for the purpose of the experiment; (2) Nutrition related task: A sheet of paper with an exercise was given for the children to complete. The purpose of this exercise was to promote dialogue and encourage children to mentally review their eating habits and evaluate them in the light of the recently acquired knowledge. These two activities were based on the material of Nestle' s Educational Program *Apetece-me* and were previously adapted by Ferreira (2013) during a similar research. The content guide was adapted according to an experienced teacher responsible for health education, and the paper sheet with an exercise task that was given to children was digitally edited to figure the logo of the brand associated with the educational session.

A week after the educational sessions, children in the Experimental group were asked to fill a questionnaire and state their agreement with 14 statements regarding Brand Image, Brand Reputation and Brand Identification. The same questionnaire was conducted with the Control Group, this time with no association of any of the brands to the previous educational program.

### **3.5 Measures**

To measure **Brand Image**, following Barros (2011) study, it was proposed a projective technique that asks the respondents to imagine that the company comes to life as a person and then rank its personality in a likert scale from 1 "I totally disagree" to 5 "I totally agree". The author used the Aaker (1997) scale of brand Personality which accesses five dimensions (Excitement, Sincerity, Competence,

Sophistication and Ruggedness), 15 facets and 42 traits. After conducting a pretest with children and consulting an expert, the author chose to use only the five dimensions to address the Brand Image in her study. However, the results weren't conclusive and her advice for future research was to go deeper regarding Aaker's scale. Therefore, for the matter of the current study, we used the 7 traits of Aaker's scale that would be more easily understood by the children of this age: "honest", "friendly", "young", "unique", "intelligent", "sophisticated" and "tough". Each of this traits corresponded to a different facet.

In order to evaluate the impact of the educational program on **Brand Reputation**, a combination of the procedures designed by Stanaland et al. (2011) and Selnes (1993) was applied. The methodology was adapted to the age group and Portuguese language, following some of the modifications to these studies developed by Pais (2012) and later used by Ferreira (2013) on a similar research. Regarding the study developed by Stanaland et al. (2011), it was considered that children would not be able to make the appropriate distinction between the words "reliable" and "trustworthy" which constitute two different statements. Therefore, only 2 of the 3 items were presented to children: "XX is an honest brand" and "XX is a brand in which I can trust". In what concerns the second study, Selnes (1993), the word "reputation" was replaced by "image" and the word "competitors" was replaced by "other brands". As a result, children were exposed to "My friends and family have a positive image of the brand XX" and "XX has a more positive image when compared with other similar brands". Another modification suggested by Pais (2012) and Ferreira (2013) is the replacement of the 6 and 7 points scales used in the previous studies. Instead, we used a five point smiley face scale from 1=Completely Disagree to 5=Completely Agree which we believed to be more appropriate for children in this

stage of cognitive development (McNeal, 1992).

To measure **Brand Identification**, we used the Self-Image Congruence Scale (Sirgy et al., 1997). The scale was used in 3 studies conducted by Sirgy et al. (1997) and the intent was to measure the degree to which the consumer perceives some similarity between his/her self-image and the image of the product or brand. For the purpose of this research, we followed some adaptations by Pais (2012). As a result, children were asked to state their agreement on a five-point scale with the statements: “XX reflects who I am”; “People similar to me drink or use XX”; “If XX was a person, we would be very similar”. Additionally, Pais (2012) suggested to give examples in brackets to help children to understand the statement (e.g. “XX reflects who I am (for example: a person with energy, happy, etc.)”).

To address the **Perceived Intent**, children were asked what they thought the source of the logo on the educational program material wanted them to do (Carter et al., 2011; Donohue et al., 1980; Macklin, 1987). The answers provided were five images with their written descriptions: “Eat healthily”, “Buy the brand’s tennis shoes/yogurt”, “Use/Drink the brand’s product”, “Pay more attention in class” and other. According to Carter et al. (2011), a child would be considered to understand the persuasive intent if he/she would understand not only the consumption intent (“Use/Drink the brand’s product”), but also the selling intent (“Buy the brand’s tennis shoes/yogurt”).

#### **4. Results**

We started by analysing the reliability of the items addressing the variables of Brand Image, Brand Reputation and Brand Identification. Starting with the Brand Image scale, initially composed of 7 adjectives, it revealed an alpha of 0,658. In order to increase this variable’s reliability, we removed the item “exigent” and computed the overall Brand Image by averaging the 6 adjectives left in our scale (now with an alpha

of 0,7). Regarding the items addressing Brand Reputation and Brand Identification (4 and 3, respectively), the resulting alphas from the reliability tests were 0,791 for Brand Reputation and 0,672 for Brand Identification. We also considered these two variables as reliable, computing the average of the items included in each variable in order to get the overall Brand Reputation and Brand Identification.

#### 4.1 Brand Image

We expected the educational program to have a positive impact on the Brand Image in general. Therefore, we computed a t-test on the mean's difference between the Experimental Group (all the groups) and the Control Group. The results showed there was a significant difference between the two groups on the overall image ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=3,9089; \bar{x}_c=3,5423; p=0,000$ ) and on the adjectives *Honest* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4,13; \bar{x}_c=3,72; p=0,05$ ), *Friend* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4,29; \bar{x}_c=3,65; p=0,00$ ), *Unique* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=3,85; \bar{x}_c=3,41; p=0,036$ ) and *Intelligent* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4,15; \bar{x}_c=3,50; p=0,000$ ).

Considering the four brands individually, we compared the results between the Control and Experimental groups by computing a Mean Whitney test. For Nike, the results revealed a significant difference for the overall Brand Image ( $p=0,048$ ) and for the adjective *Friend* ( $p=0,021$ ). Considering New Balance, there was a significant difference for the overall Brand Image and for all the traits of our Brand Image scale: *Honest* ( $p=0,000$ ), *Friend* ( $p=0,000$ ), *Young* ( $p=0,016$ ), *Unique* ( $p=0,009$ ) and *Sophisticated* ( $p=0,040$ ). Regarding Alpro, results were significant for the overall Brand Image ( $p=0,05$ ) and for the adjectives *Honest* ( $p=0,039$ ), *Friend* ( $p=0,06$ ) and *Intelligent* ( $p=0,019$ ). Lastly, for Danone, the difference was significant for the overall Brand Image ( $p=0,033$ ) and for the traits *Friend* ( $p=0,012$ ) and *Intelligent* ( $p=0,12$ ).

Although every brand registered a significant result concerning Brand image, for Nike the impact was not according to our expectations. Unlike the other brands, the

educational program actually resulted in a negative impact on Nike's overall image. We wondered if these results would be related to the low cause-brand-fit that was detected in the pre-test, but we couldn't validate it on the final questionnaire. For this reason, our results suggest H1 to be rejected for the case of Nike, but not for the other brands.

Regarding Brand Familiarity, we expected the impact on Brand Image resulting from the educational program to be higher when the sponsor was a less familiar brand (H1a). To confirm our hypothesis, we grouped together the two familiar brands and non-familiar brands and conducted t-tests to compare them with the respective control groups. On one hand, the results suggest there is no significant difference ( $p=0,917$ ) between the experimental group including the familiar brands and the correspondent control group (3,9188 and 3,9040 respectively). On the other hand, for the non-familiar brands, there was a significant difference between the overall Brand Image of the two groups ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=3,8952$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,1912$ ;  $p=0,000$ ) and the adjectives: *Honest* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,24$ ;  $p=0,000$ ), *Friend* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4,20$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,21$ ;  $p=0,000$ ), *Unique* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=3,91$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,18$ ;  $p=0,015$ ), *Intelligent* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,21$ ;  $p=0,00$ ) and *Sophisticated* ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=3,57$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,09$ ;  $p=0,039$ ). Since we had the previous results from Nike, one of the familiar brands, our results suggest not to reject H1a since the educational program had a significant effect only for the non-familiar brands.

Hypothesis H1b predicted the impact of the educational program to be higher when the brand was in a low involvement category. To confirm this hypothesis, we grouped together the two yogurt brands and tennis shoes brands and conducted t-tests to compare them with the control groups. The results suggest there is a significant difference for both groups ( $p=0,006$  for the yogurts category and  $p=0,031$  for the tennis shoes category) but a slightly higher impact for the yogurt brands (0,0060),

thus not rejecting H1b.

#### **4.2. Brand Reputation**

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the educational program would have a positive impact on the Brands' Reputation. To test this hypothesis, the overall Brand Reputation was compared between the Control and the Experimental Groups. A t-test revealed there was no significant difference between the two groups ( $p=0,085$ ). We also tested the 4 items addressing this variable independently and there were significant differences for the items 1 ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4,15$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,72$ ;  $p=0,04$ ) and 3 ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4,08$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,68$ ;  $p=0,016$ ).

Furthermore, we conducted Mean Whitney tests to address the differences between the control and experimental groups of each brand individually. The results revealed that the only brands showing significant differences in the overall Brand Reputation were Alpro ( $p=0,024$ ) and New Balance ( $p=0,036$ ). This result is in line with our expectations regarding H2a, since these two were the non-familiar brands and were expected to have the highest impact regarding Brand Reputation. To confirm these results, we grouped the brands according to the level of familiarity and conducted t-tests, comparing them with the control groups. There were significant differences between the non-familiar group and the respective control group ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=3,6286$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,1985$ ;  $p=0,014$ ) but this didn't happen for the familiar brands ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=4,0897$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=4,0809$ ;  $p=0,959$ ). These results support hypothesis H2a.

Hypothesis H2b predicted the impact of the educational program on Brand Reputation would be higher for the low involvement category (Alpro and Danone). To validate this hypothesis, we grouped the two yogurts brands and tennis shoes brands and conducted t-tests to compare them with the control groups. Only in the yogurts category the impact on Brand Reputation was significant ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=3,8750$ ;  $\bar{x}_c=3,4706$ ;  $p=0,31$ ) which confirms our expectations and validates our hypothesis H2b.

### 4.3 Brand Identification

We expected the educational program to have a positive impact on Brand Identification (H3). Therefore, we conducted a t-test comparing the Experimental and Control groups regarding the means of the 3 items addressing this variable. The results showed there was no significant difference between these two groups ( $p=0,973$ ). In fact, the t-tests comparing the 3 items independently even found a significant difference for item 2 ( $\bar{x}_{ex}=2,97; \bar{x}_c=3,43; p=0,44$ ) contrary to our expectations. Therefore, we reject H3.

The results regarding the four brands individually can be found in Appendix XX. After computing Mean Whitney tests by comparing the control and experimental groups, we found that the only brand showing a significant impact in the overall Brand Identification was Nike ( $p=0,07$ ). However, contrary to our expectations, but in line with the results for H1, the control group of this brand revealed the highest values when compared with the experimental group. Also, Alpro didn't show any significant result and for New Balance and Danone only 2 or 1 of the items revealed significant differences, respectively.

Regarding Brand Familiarity, we once again grouped the four brands and compared them with the control groups conducting t-tests. The results didn't show significant differences for any of the groups and for the familiar brands the mean of the Brand Identification was even lower for the experimental group. Therefore, we reject H3a.

When addressing Product Involvement, we grouped the brands according to the respective category and conducted t-tests to compare them with the control groups. This time, we found significant differences for the two groups, but only the yogurts category registered a positive impact on Brand Identification. When comparing the groups including the tennis shoes brands, the highest mean was found in the control



group. The strongest impact on Brand Identification was registered for the brands in the yogurts category, which is in line with our expectations for H3b. Thus, we do not reject this hypothesis.

#### **4.4 Perceived Intent**

Regarding the Perceived Intent, the majority of children (85,14%) identified “Eat healthily” as the brands’ motivation for sponsoring the educational program. Closely 10% (9,46%) of the respondents answered “Buy the brand’s tennis/yogurts” and 4% identified “Use/Drink the brand’s product” as their perceived intent.

After analysing the results for each brand individually, we conducted a chi-square test on these differences but couldn’t find an association between the brand and the perceived intent ( $p=0,714$ ). Next, in line with the previous analyses, we grouped together the brands according to their familiarity (familiar/non-familiar) and category involvement (high/low). Once again, we conducted a chi-square test on the differences between these groups (familiar/non-familiar and tennis shoes/yogurts brands). However, in line with the previous results, we couldn’t find a significant association between any of these groups and the Perceived Intent ( $p=0,431$  for the brand familiarity and  $p=0,691$  for the product category analysis).

Therefore, our results suggest that the Perceived Intent is not significantly associated to Brand Familiarity or Product Involvement.

#### **5. Discussions and implications**

The aim of this research was to study how Brand Familiarity, Product Involvement and Cause-Brand fit would moderate the impact of a CSR activity (such as an educational program) on Brand Image, Brand Identification, Brand Reputation and Perceived Intent.

We started by addressing the **Cause-Brand Fit** during pre-test 1 and the results were

according to our expectations. Nike, the tennis familiar brand, was perceived as the one with the lowest cause-brand fit ( $\bar{x}=2,50$  out of 5) with this particular educational program; while Danone, the yogurts familiar brand, was perceived as the one with the highest ( $\bar{x}=4,56$  out of 5). These results should be taken into account when analyzing other moderators such as Product Involvement or Brand Familiarity. The brand Nike, familiar and in the tennis shoes category, might jeopardize the results in its groups due to the children's perceived lack of cause-brand fit.

Concerning **Brand Familiarity**, after analyzing the results of H1a and H2a we can conclude that this variable has a very important influence in the impact on Brand Image, Brand Reputation and Perceived Intent. In fact, our results even revealed that the impact on Brand Reputation almost didn't occur for the familiar brands. This could be due to the fact that, as expected, the consumers' schema for this brand is already strongly developed and less likely to be influenced by new information that would result from such an association to an educational program. On the other hand, this might represent an opportunity for the non-familiar brands to improve their image and reputation on the consumers' mind by partnering with a CSR activity.

Regarding the **Product Involvement** moderator, all the results were in line with our expectations. According to our research, the impact of the fictitious CSR activity was always positive and stronger for the brands in the low-involvement group (yogurts). In fact, the results concerning the tennis shoes category even revealed some incongruence: a significant and positive impact for the Brand Image, a non-significant result for Brand Reputation, and a negative effect on Brand Identification. This could be due to the fact that, according to our expectations, the diagnosticity of information decreases when involvement increases. As a result, corporate associations such as this educational program would have more inference on brand evaluations when

consumers have a low rather than a high involvement with the products.

Lastly, considering the moderator effect of the **Cause-brand fit**, the results were against our expectations (H4). Findings suggest that this variable actually played a key role in children's attitude towards this particular CSR activity. Nike, the brand revealing a negative cause-brand fit, was also the only brand showing significant negative impacts (on Brand Image and Brand Identification). The fact that, for children participating in the pre-test, it didn't make sense that Nike would sponsor such educational program at schools, might have been the cause of these surprising results. However, we couldn't validate these suspicions since our research design wasn't prepared for these results. Nevertheless, in the future, brands acting in the children's market should carefully select which social causes to partner with. As our results suggest, children's perceived fit between the brand and the cause might play a key role in their attitude towards CSR activities.

## **6. Limitations and future research**

The main limitation of this study was the complexity of the variables addressed. In fact, we weren't expecting the Cause-Brand Fit to play such a key role in children's attitude towards a CSR activity. As a result, on one hand, Nike's surprising and negative results prevented us from concluding about the moderators Brand Familiarity and Product Involvement in the way it was planned. On the other hand, we couldn't validate our suspicions regarding the role of the Cause-Brand fit, since our methodology wasn't adequately designed for this purpose. Thus, further research should consider enhancing the experimental design complexity (Table 1), combining three variables instead of two (Brand Familiarity, Product Involvement, and Cause Brand Fit), and therefore increasing the range of brands fictitiously sponsoring such an educational program.

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